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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THAILAND: PRE-ELECTION VIOLENCE AND ELECTION
FRAUD DISQUALIFICATIONS

REF: BANGKOK 0673

11. (SBU) Summary: As the February 6 date for national parliamentary elections in Thailand draws closer we are seeing frequent allegations of vote buying and even some reports of poll-related killings. These activities have never been absent from the Thai electoral process in the past, but the degree to which authorities are able and willing to prosecute and punish political cheaters and to guarantee the security of campaign workers and candidates is one key measure of Thailand's current level of political maturity. With just over a week to go before the election, there have been over 70 election law violation-related disqualifications, according to the Election Commission (EC). Violence has also been reported, with 9 incidents of attacks on party canvassers (several resulting in deaths) and in one case on a parliamentary candidate. A Mahachon Party candidate for Parliament has been charged with one of the murders. Over the final campaign week the allegations of fraud - and the incidences of violence - could grow. End Summary.

ACCUSATIONS OF CAMPAIGN FRAUD RISING

12. (U) The most prominent allegations of vote buying so far have been those against Deputy Agriculture Minister Newin Chidchob -- who is heading up the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) electoral campaign in the South, and against Barnharn Silpa-archa, the veteran Chart Thai (CP) leader and former Thai prime minister. In each case these high profile political figures have been accused (though in the case of Barnharn no formal complaint has been filed - yet) of offering money for votes. Both Newin and Barnharn are under threat of being "red carded" (i.e. disqualified from the elections) by the National Election Commission, but as noted in reftel, an outcome where the full weight of the electoral law is applied to them seems unlikely at the moment.

COMPLAINTS THAT CANVASSERS AND CANDIDATES OFFERING VOTERS "INCENTIVES"

13. (U) According to the Election Commission in Bangkok, by January 26, over 70 election law violation-related disqualifications have been made. Democrat Party, Mahachon Party and Chart Thai Party candidates were among those disqualified (along with a number of smaller party candidates. So far no TRT candidates have been barred for violations. Of those disqualified, 42 were party list candidates and 32 were contesting constituencies. In most cases, the complaints involve allegations that candidates had violated election laws by promising cash for votes, distributing goods such as bags of rice to prospective voters, or offering free trips to popular vacation spots. According to electoral law procedures, complaints of election violations are submitted to the Provincial Election Commission offices and, if verified at this level, are forwarded to the Central Election Commission in Bangkok for further investigation.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

14. (U) Since November last year, there have been 9 cases of violent attacks on canvassers and candidates throughout the country.

First incident - Shooting at the residence of a TRT candidate in Constituency 9, Nakhon Ratchasima on November 1, 2004.

Second incident - Shooting and killing of a canvasser of a TRT candidate in Constituency 9, Nakhon Ratchasima on November 24, 2004.

Third incident - Shooting and killing of a canvasser of a Democrat Party (DP) candidate in Constituency 2, Phrae, on December 04, 2004.

Fourth incident - Shooting and killing of a canvasser of a TRT candidate in Constituency 1, Ayutthaya on January 10, 2005. (The Mahachon Party's Ayutthaya candidate, Surachet Chaikosol, has been charged with the murder.)

Fifth incident - Shooting at the residence of a political aide to a DP candidate in Constituency 2, Phrae on January

12, 2005.

Sixth incident - Shooting and killing of a canvasser of a DP candidate in Constituency 2, Phichit on January 14, 2005.

Seventh incident - Shooting and killing of a canvasser of a Mahachon Party (MCN) candidate in Constituency 3, Chiang Rai on January 18, 2005.

Eighth incident - Attempted killing of a CT candidate in Constituency 3, Narathiwat on January 21, 2005 (the candidate was slightly injured but his aide remains in critical condition from the shooting).

Ninth incident - Gun attack on the residence of a canvasser of a DP candidate in Constituency 2, Rayong on January 21, 2005.

CLOSING DAYS COULD SEE MORE VIOLENCE AND FRAUD ALLEGATIONS

14. (SBU) Comment: If past electoral experience is an accurate guide, the violence and charges of vote buying and fraud will intensify over coming days as the February 6 polling date grows closer.

BOYCE